

WEST BENGAL FORUM ON BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Brief Report of the meeting of the ICT Initiative of the West Bengal Forum November 27, 2004, Salt Lake (SkyTECH office), Kolkata

The November 27 meeting was held as a follow-up of the October 16 initiative on Information & Communication Technologies (ICT) that was held under the banner of the West Bengal Forum on Business Partnerships for Sustainable Development, in Kolkata. The chief points that emerged from the meeting were:

1) **Approval of draft report** – The draft report generated from the Oct 16 meeting was approved with some modifications, with Wipro suggesting, and TCS seconding this later, that financial commitments were not being looked at this stage of the Forum, and that focusing on other issues that needed attention was necessary. The report will duly make a note of this when it is given final form. It was also requested that each member take the responsibility of circulating the report to at least three others in Sector V, to be able to spread the word about the Forum's work.

2) **Education** – The issue of education was debated upon at length, and its mention in the draft report found wide acceptability. Dr Gautama, Principal Secretary, IT, Govt of West Bengal welcomed the idea of working on education and Mr D K Chaudhuri, CEO, SkyTECH suggested meeting senior professors of some of the institutes to find out the issues involved. CSM's suggestion was that the first step should be to sit with the Vice Chancellor of the West Bengal University of Technology and speak to him informally. To this, Dr Gautama said the Registrar should also be included in the consultations. While Mr Syamal Bhattacharya of TCS suggested a first meeting between CSM and the VC, a further suggestion came up that other than CSM, SkyTECH, Wipro, TCS and possibly eFORCE (not confirmed because their HR needs would be different) could make a team and meet the VC in his office.

The HR issue is very important cutting across all sectors because of the absence of regulations about poaching in this sector. In spite of lesser rate compared to other states, attrition is on the rise here as the IT industry expands. Without controlling this – here is where values become very relevant – companies will incur unmanageable HR costs. Hence it was debated whether students whose education was part sponsored by companies, should be made to sign bonds when employed by them. Ms Rajyalakshmi of Metaljunction gave some suggestions for offering incentives to universities for asking students to sign bonds. Ms Indu Khattar of Wipro thought that companies should not be obligated to recruit students they train or sponsor. Mr Chaudhuri said the opportunity of interacting with institutes and academia should be such that industry can help train students to become more competitive in the job market but this should not serve as a guarantee for recruitment. It was felt that academia and students need to market themselves as US universities do (Mr Chaudhuri's comment, seconded by Ms Indu Khattar).

3) **Seminar** – Dr Gautama suggested that one of the themes that the Forum could take forward was to improve the image of Bengal through spreading the word about the success stories of Bengal. To this, Mr Randiv Mehra, Advisor CSM suggested that this agenda should be carried forward through a seminar, and it was agreed that there would be more concrete suggestions later.

4) **IT association** – It was suggested that the IT association which was to be formed about six months down the line to represent the IT industry in Sector V, should be pre-empted by the

Forum. A number of sub-committees could be formed under the banner of the Forum, to look into different issues that are faced by the IT sector like security, beautification etc. Industry representatives at the Forum identified that shanty-like eateries, which have cropped up in front of many offices in Sector V, are a security risk, and it was proposed that this issue be taken up through the Forum. A meeting of Forum members was proposed with the police officials by TCS' Syamal Bhattacharya, which found support from Wipro's Indu Khattar and Dr Gautama, along with Mr Chaudhuri. The proposal was the permanent removal of the shanties through demolition. To this, CSM suggested that since this was an issue with considerable political implications and the Forum had no prior experience in this area, it would not be advisable to take up the issue at this stage. Dr Gautama expressed his disagreement too.

But it is CSM's view as initiator and secretariat of the Forum that any issue like security, which is of a sensitive nature, can be taken up only after building up a background of knowledge and prior experience, which CSM does not have. The present mandate should be to do what CSM is capable of doing, show concrete results in a particular area and only then think of action in areas beyond its core competence.